

March 4, 2010

Dear Cheyne Families:

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of one of our teachers Michael Steffens, who passed away suddenly yesterday. Mr. Steffens has been a grade 8 teacher in the all boys class at Cheyne Middle School this year and has taught at Cheyne for 5 years. He was a dedicated, compassionate teacher who cared very deeply for his students and worked tirelessly with them to help them to be the best person they could be. He coached our football teams every year and was an avid supporter of the Terry Fox Run.

Today, we spoke to students about his death. Counsellors have been available for students and staff who wish to speak to someone at the school. They will remain at the school as long as needed.

I encourage you to provide your child with an opportunity to discuss this death in terms of your personal family beliefs. Here are some ways you can help your child deal with the shock and sadness:

- Acknowledge your child's grief and the emotional upset.
- Be available to your child. If you don't know the right thing to say, just listen. Acknowledge that we don't always have answers to why these things happen.
- Provide a reassuring environment in which your child feels comfortable expressing his or her thoughts and feelings.
- Encourage your child to deal with the death in the way that's most comfortable for him or her. Some children are open about their feelings, while others prefer not to talk about them or may only want to talk to their peers.
- Acknowledge that your child may continue to feel the impact of Mr. Steffens' death for some time to come. Help your child understand that there's no time limit on grieving.

Be aware of signs that your child may need additional support to deal with this situation. Warning signs include: prolonged physical or psychological distress (lack of appetite, sudden weight gain, persistent aches and pains, anxiety, apathy or depression), or decline in school performance. If your child has recently experienced the loss of a family member or friend, Mr. Steffen's death may be particularly traumatic.

It's important to remember that staff at the school will also be deeply affected by this sudden and tragic loss. It may help your child to know that the teachers—and Mr. Steffens' colleagues at other schools—share in their sadness.

We don't know any details of funeral arrangements yet. In the weeks to come, the school will be working on an appropriate memorial for Mr. Steffens, and we will keep you informed.

Counselling staff are available at the school if you feel that your child needs support. Please contact the school at 905-840-0402. Thank you for your support and understanding during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Hazel Mason
Principal